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## **Parental Differences in Family Processes in Chinese Families Experiencing Economic Disadvantage**

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# Parental Differences in Family Processes in Chinese Families Experiencing Economic Disadvantage

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## Abstract

Parental differences in family processes (indexed by parental responsiveness, demandingness, control, and sacrifice for children's education) were examined in 275 Chinese intact families experiencing economic disadvantage in Hong Kong. Consistent with the previous literature, results indicated that there were parent gender differences in family processes, including parental responsiveness, demandingness, control and sacrifice for children's education based on the responses of parents and adolescents. Relative to mothers, fathers were less involved in parenting and having less sacrifice for their children's education. Furthermore, adolescents perceived greater paternal-maternal differences in family processes than did parents. This is the first scientific research that studies parent gender differences in family processes in Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

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**Keywords:** family processes; parent gender differences; poverty; chinese families

# Diferencias entre padres y madres en procesos familiares en familias chinas en situación de desventaja económica

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## Resumen

Las diferencias entre padres y madres en procesos familiares (indexadas como receptividad, exigencia, control y sacrificio por la educación de los hijos) fueron examinadas en 275 familias chinas intactas en situación de desventaja económica en Hong Kong. Confirmando la literatura existente, los resultados indicaron la existencia de diferencias de género en los procesos familiares incluyendo a nivel de receptividad, exigencia, control y sacrificio por la educación de los hijos basadas en las respuestas de padres y madres y adolescentes. En relación a las madres, los padres están menos involucrados en la crianza y se sacrifican menos por la educación de sus hijos. Además, los adolescentes percibieron más diferencias entre madres y padres que ellos mismos. Ésta es la primera investigación científica que estudia las diferencias de género entre madres y padres en sus procesos familiares en familias chinas en situación de desventaja económica. Se tratan las implicaciones teóricas y practicas de los resultados.

**Palabras clave:** family processes; parent gender differences; poverty; chinese families

In social science literature, it is not difficult to find the term “parental” as to represent the attributes of both fathers and mothers (Chao, 1994; Chao & Kaeochinda, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001). One may ask the questions: do fathers and mothers have the same “parental” behaviors? Do they perform the same roles in the family? The answer brings theoretical and practical implications for our understandings of the family roles of fathers and mothers as well as their involvement in family processes. There is empirical evidence showing that parental differences in family processes influence the adolescent development (Bosco et al., 2003; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; McKinney & Renk, 2008). It is especially important for Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage, as parental differences in family processes would be heightened in the Chinese cultural context based on the role theory of cultural perspectives (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997), and among families in low socio-economic strata according to the resources perspective and the structural model (Presser, 1994; Rubin, 1976). Unfortunately, it was found that research on parental differences in family processes in economically disadvantaged families is minimal. Using the search terms of “parental difference”, “family processes” and “poverty/economic disadvantage”, an advanced search of the PsycINFO in July 2012 for the period 1980-2012 showed that there were only 38 publications. Amongst these publications, there was only one publication pertinent to the Chinese community. Similarly, computer search using search terms of “parental difference”, “family processes” and “poverty/economic disadvantage” of Social Work Abstracts in July 2012 for the period 1980-2012 showed that there was no publication.

Apart from the severe lack of research in this area, there are other limitations pertinent to the research on understanding parental differences in family processes. First, a majority of studies focus on parenting styles and parental involvement (Bosco et al., 2003; Harris & Marmer, 1996; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Paulson & Sputa, 1996), other family processes are relatively less studied. This is especially problematic in the Chinese context as the Chinese family systems as well as their intra-familial interactions were influenced strongly by Confucianism. Lam (2005) suggested that the Chinese meaning of

parenthood is “associated with the notion of ‘responsibility for children’ and ‘making sacrifice for the benefit of children’” (p. 118). In Chinese culture, it is noteworthy that parental control and parental sacrifice are distinctive features of Chinese parenting (Chao & Kaeochinda, 2010; Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, studies on parental differences in parental control and sacrifice in Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage were almost non-existent. Burton and Jerrett (2000) pointed out the “lack of attention given to cultural and contextual perspectives of family processes” (p. 1128). Hence, there is an urgent need to develop indigenous Chinese conception of family processes and study the gender differences in a more specific cultural and socio-economic context.

Second, research findings pertinent to parent gender in parenting and socialization patterns of adolescents are found equivocal. With reference to the Chinese culture, there is a strong discourse of “strict fathers, kind mothers” thesis (Wilson, 1974). However, this traditional thesis has been challenged in the contemporary Chinese literature (Shek, 1998, 2007a, 2008). In a study of 429 Chinese secondary school students, Shek (1998) argued that the concept of “strict father” made sense when “strictness” was defined in term of “harshness”. However, when “strictness” was defined as “demandingness”, fathers were not any more demanding than were mothers (Shek, 1998). Another longitudinal study of 2559 Chinese adolescents showed that general perceptions of the father’s behavioral and psychological control to be lower than those of the mother (Shek, 2008). The traditional “strict father, kind mother” thesis was prone to challenges. Obviously, research findings on parental differences in family processes of the Chinese families are inconclusive and unclear.

Another limitation is that a majority of researches studying parental differences in family processes focused mainly on adolescents’ perspective of perceived paternal and maternal socialization patterns (Bosco et al., 2003; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Shek, 2007a, 2008a & b), with parents’ perspectives often neglected. As each set of respondents only represents one perspective, employment of a single perspective to understand the association would confine the findings to one particular response set. Besides, collecting data from a single data source would increase individual response bias. Paulson and Sputa (1996) reminded

researchers to be cautious that “what parents think they may be doing in the home may not be what the adolescent perceives” (p. 371). On the contrary, a multiple perspective to study family processes can give us a more comprehensive view (Day et al., 2001).

### **Parental differences in family processes**

A review shows that the literature on parental differences in family processes covers two aspects: qualitative differences between fathers and mothers in child-rearing roles, and quantitative assessments of fathers’ and mothers’ involvement in parenting. Different theories have been proposed to explain for the different roles of fathers and mothers in family processes. First, the sex-role theory (Bem, 1974) suggests that femininity is associated with expressiveness, whereas masculinity is associated with instrumentality (Spence, 1993). Mothers may adopt a more affective style of parenting, whereas fathers may adopt a more goal-oriented style (Russell et al., 1998). Second, the gender-ideology approach suggests that gender ideologies shape the involvement of parents in parenting and doing housework. Mothers are more involved in the socialization process and family management (Coverman, 1985; Kluwer et al., 2000). Third, the role theory of cultural perspectives suggests that parenting roles and practices are determined by culture, which is historically developed and traditionally accepted. For example, with reference to the Three Cardinal Guide (*san gang*) and the Five Constant Relationships (*wu lun*) embedded in the Confucian philosophy, fathers are obliged to take up the role of training and monitoring the behaviors of children, as presented by the popular Chinese maxim “*yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo*” (it is the fathers’ fault for only nurturing but not teaching his children). Mothers, in contrast, are defined as caregivers, responsible for maintaining the childcare and household management (Shek, 2002a).

In the Chinese culture, it is noteworthy that there is a strong traditional discourse of “strict fathers, kind mothers” (Wilson, 1974). Fathers are generally regarded as “harsh disciplinarians” whereas mothers are kind and affectionate (Shek, 2002b). Popular Chinese maxims like “*bang xia chu xiao zi*” (a filial son is the product of the rod), and “*ci mu duo bai er*” (a fond mother spoils the son)

clearly state the “strict father, kind mother” thesis. However, recent studies on parent gender differences in parental control challenged the traditional “strict father, kind mother” thesis to become not more than a “cultural stereotype” in the contemporary Chinese era (Shek, 2008). Instead, the “strict mothers, kind fathers” thesis, or even “stricter mothers and kinder mothers” with fathers remaining detached (Shek, 2007a, 2008) was supported. Furstenberg (1988) referred to these phenomena as “two faces of fatherhood” (p. 193). On one hand, fathers moved towards more involvement in caring and rearing their children. On the other hand, increase in fathers’ absence of child support was also evident. However, recent research did not have conclusive results in determining which “face” of fatherhood emerges in the low socio-economic strata. Thus, it is illuminating and worthwhile to explore parental differences in family processes of Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage.

Regarding quantitative assessments of fathers’ and mothers’ parenting quality, literature review consistently shows that fathers are less involved in the socialization of children than are mothers (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Noller & Callan, 1990; Paulson & Sputa, 1996). This pattern exists during infancy and continues through middle childhood to adolescence (Collins & Russell, 1991; Parke & Buriel, 1998). There are also different theoretical accounts of the relatively lower involvement of fathers in parenting. In the psychoanalytic theory, mothers are identified more as attachment figures for the children, whereas fathers are more remote (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997). Both sex-role theory (Bem, 1974) and the gender-ideology approach suggest that mothers are more involved in the family life and children’s socialization than are fathers (Coverman, 1985; Kluwer et al., 2000). Furthermore, based on the role theory of cultural perspectives, mothers are more involved in family life and parenting than are fathers in Chinese culture, as indicated by the Chinese cultural inclination of “*Nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei*” (men manage things outside the family; women manage things inside).

Finally, the resource perspective posits that fathers comparatively pursue greater resources and decision-making power that contribute to differential roles and tasks in parenting between fathers and mothers (Presser, 1994). Based on this perspective, parental differences in family processes may be heightened in low socio-economic context. The

structural model suggests that blue-collar (lower socio-economic status) families, when compared with white-collar families (higher socio-economic status), demonstrate more patriarchal authority and clearly defined divisions of labor, with less shared decision-making and more defined spousal roles. There are research findings showing that fathers of low socio-economic status were more detached in parenting (Presser, 1994; Rubin, 1976). Furthermore, the physically demanding jobs and long, non-standard hours of work add additional barriers to economically disadvantaged fathers' parenting involvement.

### **Aspects of family processes in Chinese families**

Against this background, a study based on survey research design was conducted to examine parental differences in family processes of Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage. In the study, four aspects of family processes pertinent to Chinese culture were assessed: parental responsiveness, parental demandingness, parental control, and parental sacrifice for child's education.

Regarding family processes, parenting style was regarded as the "fundamental" one (Shek, 2002b). Maccoby and Martin (1983) classified parenting style into two-dimensional framework: parental demandingness and parental responsiveness. Baumrind (1991) further elaborated: "demandingness refers to the claims parents make on the child to become integrated into the family whole by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys. Responsiveness refers to actions which intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to the child's special needs and demands" (p.748). Parental demandingness expects parents to be more restrictive and firm in monitoring and supervision of their children. Parental responsiveness entails qualities of sensitivity, warmth, encouragement and closeness through responding to the needs of the children.

In the Chinese culture, parental control is a distinctive feature of Chinese parenting (Chao & Tseng, 2002). As suggested by Chao (1994), parental control is associated with the concept of "training", which may be influenced by Confucian ideas. Chinese parenting based on



indigenous concepts utilized behavioral control, expressed by the terms “*jiao xun*” (to train) and “*guan*” (to govern). Yang (1981) proposed nine features of Chinese socialization practices: dependency training, conformity training, modesty training, self-suppression training, self-contentment training, punishment orientation, shame strategy, parent-centeredness, and multiple parenting. These socialization practices reflect the Chinese concept of parental control.

Parental sacrifice has been regarded as a central feature of family life in the Asian culture (Chao & Kaeochinda, 2010). Under Chinese familism, family members are supposed to subordinate their personal interests and goals to the glory and welfare of the family as a whole (Yeh & Yang, 1997). Parental sacrifice for children’s education is a process in which parents give up their personal needs for the sake of educational needs of their children. The process involves three important components. First, education of children requires parents to mobilize different family resources, such as money, time, and effort. Second, due to limited resources with the family, parents face the struggle in its mobilization and distribution. Third, parents prioritize the educational needs of children over their own personal needs, and thus there is mobilization of the resources for children’s education over parental fulfilment of their own needs (Leung & Shek, 2011a). Based on a survey of the literature on family resources for children’s education, including family capital theory (Coleman, 1988, 1990), family investment model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007), parental involvement on children’s schooling and activities (Epstein, 1987, 1992; Grolnick et al., 1997), and qualitative findings of Chinese parents and adolescents, five dimensions of parental sacrifice on child’s education were identified: striving of financial resources, time spent on child’s education, restructuring of daily routine, sacrifice of lifestyle and aspiration, and shielding from worries (Leung & Shek, 2011a). Though parental sacrifice for children’s education has been a distinctive feature of Chinese family processes, research on the related area is far lagged behind (Leung & Shek, 2011b).

With respect to children’s education, there may be divergent views concerning the roles of fathers and mothers in the context of poverty. On one hand, fathers are more conscious of the education and achievement of their children (Collins & Russell, 1991). With the fathers’ role of

striving for adequate resources for the education and development of their children, it is especially demanding for fathers experiencing economic disadvantage, as the financial resources are very limited. Thus, fulfilling the role of fathers for their children's education would involve paternal sacrifice for their own needs. On the other hand, mothers were found to spend more time on the educational needs of their children and were more involved in school activities (Nock & Kingston, 1988; Russell & Russell, 1987). It is also taxing for mothers experiencing economic disadvantage who are generally of lower educational standard and perceiving themselves as less knowledgeable of the school system (Crosnoe et al, 2002; Furstenberg et al., 1999). Thus, maternal sacrifice for children's education should not be undermined. It is both illuminating and interesting to explore parental differences on sacrifice for children's education in economically disadvantaged families.

### **Research questions and hypotheses**

Based on the review of different theories (psychoanalytic theory, sex-role theory, gender ideology approach, resources perspective, role theory of cultural perspective), evidence of recent studies on parental differences in family processes (Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Shek 2007a, 2008) and the recent challenge of the "strict fathers, kind mothers" thesis (Wilson, 1974), four research questions were addressed in this study:

The first question is: are there any differences in parental responsiveness between fathers and mothers? It was suggested that mothers would be perceived to have higher parental responsiveness than did fathers. As both parents' and adolescents' perspectives on family processes were examined, it was hypothesized that mothers would have stronger endorsement of parental responsiveness than would fathers based on the parental perspective (Hypothesis 1a), and adolescents would perceive higher maternal responsiveness than did paternal responsiveness based on the adolescent perspective (Hypothesis 1b).

The second question is: are there any differences in parental demandingness between fathers and mothers? As mothers were more involved in socialization, it was hypothesized that mothers would have

stronger endorsement of parental demandingness than would fathers based on the parental perspective (Hypothesis 2a), and adolescents would perceive more maternal demandingness than paternal demandingness based on the adolescent perspective (Hypothesis 2b).

The third question is: are there any differences in parental control between fathers and mothers? It was hypothesized that mothers would display more control than do fathers based on the parental perspective (Hypothesis 3a), and adolescents would perceive more maternal control than paternal control based on the adolescent perspective (Hypothesis 3b).

The fourth question is: are there any differences in parental sacrifice for children's future between fathers and mothers? From the traditional Chinese culture, mothers took up the family roles of nurturing and taking care of the children. With the Chinese cultural inclination of "*Nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei*" (men manage things outside the family; women manage things inside), mothers may be more involved in children's education and make more sacrifice for their children. It was hypothesized that mothers would display more sacrifice than would fathers from the parental perspective (Hypothesis 4a), and adolescents would perceive more maternal sacrifice for their education than paternal sacrifice based on the adolescent perspective (Hypothesis 4b).

## **Methods**

### **Participants and procedures**

A cross-sectional survey with purposeful sampling was conducted. Intact Chinese families having at least one child aged 11 to 16 experiencing economic disadvantage were invited to participate in the study. The concept of relative poverty was adopted, with 50% of monthly median domestic household income according to Hong Kong Population By-census 2006 used as the poverty threshold. Families experiencing economic disadvantage were identified and recruited by children and youth service centers, school social work services, and community centers across Hong Kong. Finally, there were 276 families participated in the study. There was one set of invalid questionnaires,

leaving 275 sets of questionnaires for analyses.

Either the first author or trained social workers conducted the data collection. Fathers, mothers and adolescents were given explanations about the purpose of the research, procedure of data collection, the rights of respondents to voluntarily participate and withdrawal from the study, as well as the use of the data in the study. Informed consent was obtained. Fathers and mothers were requested to complete the Father Questionnaire and Mother Questionnaire respectively which contained measures of parental responsiveness, parental demandingness, parental control, and parental sacrifice, whereas adolescents were requested to complete the Adolescent Questionnaire which contained measures of paternal/maternal responsiveness, paternal/maternal demandingness, paternal/maternal control, and paternal/maternal sacrifice. To ensure confidentiality, the questionnaire was completed by each participant separately. The questionnaire was administered in a self-administered format. In case the participants had difficulties comprehending the questionnaires, the first author or trained social workers would ask questions or items in an interview format. Parents took around 45 minutes to one hour to complete the questionnaires, depending on their literacy level. Adolescents took around 35 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

The mean ages of the fathers and mothers were 49.94 (SD = 9.28) and 42.18 (SD = 4.97), respectively. Most fathers were born in Hong Kong (n = 98, 35.6%) or had resided in Hong Kong for more than 20 years (n = 115, 41.8%), whereas the mode of duration of stay of mothers in Hong Kong was between 6 and 10 years (n = 103, 37.5%). Regarding the educational attainment of fathers and mothers, a majority were of low educational standard, with 205 fathers (74.5%) and 204 mothers (74.2%) at the junior secondary level or lower. There were 211 (76.7%) fathers who had a job, 30 (10.9%) were unemployed, and 26 (9.5%) were retired. A high proportion of mothers were housewives (n = 199, 72.4%). The average number of children in the families was 2.34 (SD = .90). There were 96 families receiving welfare assistance (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance) from the Government, representing 34.8% of the sample.

From the adolescent profile, there were 134 boys (48.7%) and 141 girls (51.3%) participated in the study. The ratio was close to that of the

profile based on secondary schools (51.3: 48.7) in Hong Kong according to the 2006 Population By-census. The mean age of the adolescents was 13.56 (SD = 1.54), with the mean of boys and girls at 13.40 (SD = 1.60) and 13.71 (SD = 1.47) respectively. There were 18 adolescents (6.5%) studying in Primary Five or below (Grade 5 and below), 47 (17.1%) in Primary Six (Grade 6), 63 (22.9%) in Secondary One (Grade 7), 46 (16.7%) in Secondary Two (Grade 8), 42 (15.3%) in Secondary Three (Grade 9), 28 (10.2%) in Secondary Four (Grade 10), and 29 (10.5%) in Secondary Five and above (Grade 11 and above). Regarding duration of stay in Hong Kong, 144 adolescents (52.4%) were born in Hong Kong, and 74 (27.0%) had resided in Hong Kong for more than 7 years. But still, 24 (8.7%) adolescents had resided in Hong Kong for less than 3 years.

## **Instruments**

### **Assessment of parenting quality**

Regarding parenting quality, it was suggested that both global parenting style and specific parenting practices are essential elements in constituting the central features of parenting (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Shek (1999) suggested that we should examine different aspects of parenting because they “can reveal the complex nature of the linkage between parenting and adolescent psychological well-being” (p. 273). As such, two separate measures of parenting were employed in the study.

1. *Paternal Parenting Style Scale (FPS/APPS) and Maternal Parenting Style Scale (MPS/AMPS)*. Based on the framework of Maccoby and Martin (1983) and parenting assessment work of Lamborn et al. (1991), Shek (1999) developed a modified version of the Paternal/Maternal Parenting Style Scale (FPS/MPS). There are two subscales: 1) Paternal/Maternal Demandingness Scale (FDEM/MDEM) assessing demandingness of the father and mother towards the child’s behaviors; and 2) Paternal/Maternal Responsiveness Scale (FRES/MRES) assessing responsiveness of the father and mother to the child’s behaviors. There are 7 items in

the Demandingness Scale and 13 items in the Responsiveness Scale. The scales were found valid and reliable in the Chinese culture with internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and concurrent validity (Shek, 1999, 2003). The total score of each scale was used as an indicator of the level of parental demandingness and responsiveness, with a higher score indicating more positive parental attributes. Reliability analyses showed that Paternal/Maternal Demandingness Scale and Paternal/Maternal Responsiveness Scale perceived by parents (FDEM/MDEM and FRES/MRES) and adolescents (APDEM/AMDEM and APRES/AMRES) had acceptable reliability in this study ( $\alpha = .75$  for FDEM, .65 for MDEM, .75 for APDEM, .72 for AMDEM, .70 for FRES, .61 for MRES, .82 for APRES and .80 for AMRES, respectively).

2. *Chinese Paternal Control Scale (APCS) and Chinese Maternal Control Scale (AMCS)*. Based on a review of the literature, Shek (2005, 2007b) developed a twelve-item Chinese Paternal/Maternal Control Scale to assess control based on indigenous Chinese cultural beliefs. Adolescents are requested to rate the degree of agreement with each item on a 4-point scale ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. Examples of the items are “My father expects me to be mature (*sheng xing*)”; “My father expects me to have good behavior so that I will not bring dishonor to the family (*you ru jia sheng*)”. The APCS and AMCS showed internal consistency and divergent validity in previous studies (Shek, 2007b). The total score of the items in each scale is an indicator of the degree of parental control based on Chinese concepts, with a higher score indicating a higher level of Chinese parental control. The parental version of the scale (FCS/MCS) was modelled from adolescent’s version of Chinese Paternal/Maternal Control Scale respectively. Reliability analyses showed that FCS, MCS, APCS and AMCS had satisfactory reliability in this study ( $\alpha = .85$  for FCS, .87 for MCS, .87 for APCS, and .88 for AMCS, respectively).

## Assessment of Parental Sacrifice

### 1. *Paternal/Maternal Sacrifice for Children’s Education Scale*

(APSA/AMSA). Based on the literature on family investment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007), family capital (Coleman, 1988, 1990), and parental involvement in children's education (Epstein, 1992; Grolnick et al., 1997), as well as qualitative findings from focus groups of parents and adolescents respectively, an indigenous scale assessing parental sacrifice for children's education was developed (Leung & Shek, 2011a). The scale was developed with 23 items measuring dimensions of sacrifice in terms of financial resources, time on children's education, reorganization of daily routine, sacrifice of lifestyle and aspiration, and shielding from worries. Participants were requested to rate the degree of agreement with each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". Examples of the items are "To fulfill my child's educational needs, I eat and wear less"; "Even I am tired, I try my best to understand my child's school life". Both PSA and MSA showed internal consistency, divergent validity and factorial validity in validation study (Leung & Shek, 2011b). Higher scores indicate greater parental sacrifice for children's education. Reliability analyses showed that Paternal/Maternal Sacrifice for Children's Education Scale perceived by parents (FSA/MSA) and adolescents (APSA/AMSA) had excellent reliability in this study ( $\alpha = .93$  for FSA, .92 for MSA, .94 for APSA, and .94 for AMSA, respectively).

## Results

To examine parental differences in family processes (indexed by parental responsiveness, demandingness, control, and sacrifice for children's education), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and several univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed. In order to examine parental differences in family processes, both perspectives of parents and adolescents were analysed.

From the parents' data, using Wilks' criterion, the results indicated a significant overall main effect for the fathers' and mothers' reports, with  $F(1,548) = 19.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .22. To examine the differences in the individual dependent variable, univariate ANOVAs

was performed. Bonferroni correction was adopted to reduce the chance of committing inflated Type I error, i.e.  $\alpha = .05/4$ , i.e. .013. Table 1 lists the results of lists the means and standard deviations for the measures of dyadic qualities, the univariate ANOVAs, and effect values in terms of partial eta squared of the dyadic qualities from the perspectives of parents.



Table 1.

*Means and standard deviations for the measures of family processes, and the univariate ANOVAs, and effect size of the parent gender differences of family processes perceived by parents*

Family processes perceived by parents							
	Fathers' report		Mothers' report		Effect		Comparison
Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> value	<i>Partial</i> $\eta^2$	
Parental responsiveness	15.47	3.28	17.04	2.77	51.74***	.16	S (M>F)
Parental demandingness	11.71	3.36	13.10	2.61	44.32***	.14	S (M>F)
Parental control	38.12	4.46	38.93	4.88	5.80 <sup>#</sup>	.02	S (M>F)
Parental sacrifice	104.66	15.62	109.92	14.79	22.90***	.08	S (M>F)

<sup>#</sup>.013 (Bonferroni correction was adopted to guard against familywise Type I error)  $< p < .05$ , \* $p < .013$  (Bonferroni correction was adopted to guard against familywise Type I error), \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Possible range of scores in the scale: FRES, MRES (0 to 22 points); FDEM, MDEM (0 to 16 points); FCS, MCS (12 to 60 points), FSA, MSA (23 to 138).

*Parenting responsiveness* Paternal Responsiveness Scale reported by fathers (FRES) vs Maternal Responsiveness Scale reported by mothers (MRES). *Parenting demandingness* Paternal Demandingness Scale reported by fathers (FDEM) vs Maternal Demandingness Scale reported by mothers (MDEM). *Parental control* Chinese Paternal Control Scale reported by fathers (FCS) vs Chinese Maternal Control Scale reported by mothers (MCS). *Parental sacrifice* Paternal Sacrifice for Children's Education Scale reported by fathers (FSA) vs Maternal Sacrifice for Children's Education Scale reported by mothers (MSA).

S significant at .05% level. *M>F* Mothers' scores higher than fathers' scores.

Univariate analyses of variance showed significant differences on parenting responsiveness between fathers' and mothers' reports, with  $F(1,548) = 51.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .16. Analyses showed that fathers had generally lower endorsement of parental responsiveness than did mothers. Hypothesis 1a was supported. For parental demandingness, univariate ANOVA showed that there was significant difference between fathers' and mothers' reports, with  $F(1,548) = 44.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .14. Again, fathers had generally lower endorsement of parental demandingness than did mothers. Hypothesis 2a was supported.

For parental control, univariate ANOVA shows marginal significant effect for fathers' and mothers' reports, with  $F(1,548) = 5.80$ ,  $p < .05$  (but  $p > .013$ ), partial eta squared = .02. Hypothesis 3a was marginally supported.

For parental sacrifice for children's education, univariate analyses of variance showed that there was significant difference between fathers' and mothers' reports, with  $F(1,548) = 22.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .08. Fathers had generally lower parental sacrifice for children's education than did mothers. Hypothesis 4a was supported.

Regarding the adolescents' data for family processes (indexed by paternal/maternal responsiveness, demandingness, control, and sacrifice for children's education), using Wilks' criterion, the results indicated a significant overall main effect for the perceived paternal and maternal family processes, with  $F(1,548) = 54.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .44.

Again, univariate ANOVAs were performed to examine the differences in the individual dependent variable. Bonferroni correction was adopted to reduce the chance of committing inflated Type I error, i.e.  $\alpha = .05/4$ , i.e. .013. Table 2 lists the results of the means and standard deviations for the measures of dyadic qualities, the univariate ANOVAs, and effect values in terms of partial eta squared from the perspective of adolescents.

Table 2.

*Means and standard deviations for the measures of family processes, and the univariate ANOVAs, and effect size of the parent gender differences of family processes perceived by adolescents*

Family processes perceived by adolescents							
	Paternal		Maternal		Effect		Comparison
Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> value	<i>Partial</i> $\eta^2$	
Parenting responsiveness	12.53	4.50	15.52	4.05	154.29***	.36	S ( <i>A<sub>m</sub></i> > <i>A<sub>p</sub></i> )
Parental demandingness	9.51	4.05	11.41	3.49	111.21***	.29	S ( <i>A<sub>m</sub></i> > <i>A<sub>p</sub></i> )
Parental control	36.44	5.86	38.42	5.78	35.23***	.11	S ( <i>A<sub>m</sub></i> > <i>A<sub>p</sub></i> )
Parental sacrifice	84.42	20.46	99.28	20.48	163.51***	.37	S ( <i>A<sub>m</sub></i> > <i>A<sub>p</sub></i> )

\* $p < .013$  (Bonferroni correction was adopted to guard against familywise Type I error), \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Possible range of scores in the scale: APRES, AMRES (0 to 22 points); APDEM, AMDEM (0 to 16 points); APCS, AMCS (12 to 60 points), APSA, AMSA (23 to 138).

*Parenting responsiveness* Paternal Responsiveness Scale reported by adolescents (APRES) vs Maternal Responsiveness Scale reported by adolescents (AMRES). *Parenting demandingness* Paternal Demandingness Scale reported by adolescents (APDEM) vs Maternal Demandingness Scale reported by adolescents (AMDEM). *Parental control* Chinese Paternal Control Scale reported by adolescents (APCS) vs Chinese Maternal Control Scale reported by adolescents (AMCS). *Parental sacrifice* Paternal Sacrifice for Children's Education Scale reported by adolescents (APSA) vs Maternal Sacrifice for Children's Education Scale reported by adolescents (AMSA).

S significant at .05% level.  $A_m > A_p$  Adolescents' perceived maternal scores higher than perceived paternal scores.

Univariate analyses of variance showed significant differences between paternal and maternal responsiveness perceived by adolescents, with  $F(1,548) = 154.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .36. Analyses showed that fathers were perceived to have lower endorsement of parental responsiveness than were mothers. Hypothesis 1b was supported. Similar to the results as parents' perspective, there was significant difference between paternal and maternal demandingness perceived by adolescents, with  $F(1,548) = 111.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .29. Analyses showed that fathers were perceived to have lower endorsement of parental demandingness than were mothers. Hypothesis 2b was supported.

For parental control, there was significant difference between paternal and maternal parental control perceived by adolescents, with  $F(1,548) = 35.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .11. Analyses showed that fathers were perceived to have generally less parental control than were mothers. Hypothesis 3b was supported.

For parental sacrifice for children's education, univariate analyses of variance showed that there was significant difference between paternal and maternal sacrifice perceived by adolescents, with  $F(1,548) = 163.51$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .37. Fathers were perceived to have lower parental sacrifice for children's education than were mothers. Hypothesis 4b was supported.

## **Discussion**

This study attempted to examine parental differences in family processes in Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage. There are several unique features in the study. First, different aspects of family processes were examined, including parental responsiveness, demandingness, control and sacrifice for children's education. Second, indigenous Chinese conceptions of family processes were adopted and measured. Parental difference in parental sacrifice for child's education, in particular, is distinctive in this study as research on this area is almost non-existent. Third, the Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage were recruited as participants of the study. Both cultural and socio-economic contexts were unique in the related studies.

Fourth, parental differences on family processes from both parents' perspective and adolescents' perspective were examined. Fifth, validated indigenous measurement tools of parental control and parental sacrifice for children's education were employed.

Based on the perspective of parents, it was found that there were significant differences in parental responsiveness, demandingness, control and sacrifice for children's education between fathers and mothers, with mothers showing higher levels than fathers. Similar results were obtained from adolescent perspective with mothers be perceived to exhibit higher levels of positive parental responsiveness, demandingness, control and sacrifice for children's education than were fathers. The results were consistent with pervious empirical research showing that fathers were less involved in parenting (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Noller & Callan, 1990; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Shek 2007a, 2008). However, parental difference in parental sacrifice is a unique contribution of this study.

The findings suggest that mothers showed stronger endorsement of parental responsiveness than did fathers. It should be noted that the effect size of father-mother discrepancies in parental responsiveness, especially from adolescents' point of view, was remarkable (Stevens, 2002). The observed difference was consistent with the theoretical accounts of sex-role theory, gender ideology approach and resources perspective where mothers are seen as primarily responsible for maintaining the daily management and nurturing the children whereas fathers are relatively more detached in caring and supporting their children.

Besides, mothers perceived themselves and were perceived by adolescents to exhibit more parental demandingness and control than did fathers, and the effect size between mother/father and paternal/maternal discrepancies on parental demandingness was also high (Stevens, 2002). The present study provides evidence showing that fathers are no longer "harsh disciplinarians" (Shek, 2002a) in Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is illuminating to see whether Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage present a "strict mothers, kind fathers" phenomenon, or support a "stricter mothers and kinder mothers with detached fathers" thesis (Shek, 2007a, 2008). Though a more egalitarian gender roles in

the contemporary world would expect fathers and mothers to have congruent parenting practices, the relative large effect size of parent gender difference on parental responsiveness perceived by both parents and adolescents in the present study indicates that the “strict mothers, kind fathers” thesis may not truly describe the phenomenon. The findings support the thesis of “stricter mothers and kinder mothers with detached fathers” (Shek, 2007a, 2008), where fathers getting less involved in exercising responsiveness, demandingness and control in socialization of their children than did mothers. The detachment of fathers may be intensified in low socio-economic context. The physically demanding jobs and long and non-standard hours of work add burdens for fathers experiencing economically disadvantage to be involved in parenting. In contrast, many mothers were housewives who may find difficulties in employment as well as have obligation to look after their children (72.4% of the mothers were housewives in the studied sample). As mothers spend most of their time at home taking care of their children, they are sensitive to the development of adolescents. Family rules and standards are essential for mothers to monitor the behaviors of their children. Thus, there is a need for mothers to pick up the role of disciplinarian in the family. Mothers have to manage the dual roles of both disciplinarian and caregiver of their children.

When looking into parental sacrifice for children’s education, it was found that mothers perceived and were perceived significantly higher level of sacrifice for children’s education than did fathers. There are two possibilities to account for the higher level of maternal sacrifice for children’s education than paternal sacrifice. First, mothers were designated to care about all spheres of adolescents’ lives. Thus, they are more ready to devote their time, money and effort for the education of adolescents, and these involve accommodation of daily routines and sacrifice of their personal needs. In contrast, fathers perform the main role of mobilizing financial resources for the support of the family. Thus, the scope of sacrifice between fathers and mothers was somewhat different, with maternal sacrifice covering more facets of sacrifice than paternal sacrifice. Furthermore, a majority of mothers were immigrants from Mainland China with shorter duration of stay in Hong Kong than were fathers. Mothers might perceive leaving the mainland to settle in

Hong Kong as a harsh choice, as they had to leave their own parents, relatives, friends and hometowns, move to a strange place and live at subsistence levels. With the expectation of better education for their children, mothers' decision to settle in a strange environment was obviously a sacrifice. Thus, maternal sacrifice was more prominent than paternal sacrifice from both parents' and adolescents' perspectives.

It is noteworthy to find that adolescents' perception of paternal-maternal discrepancies in family processes had greater effect size than father-mother discrepancies. This echoes with the literature that adolescents rated differently from their parents (Callan & Noller, 1986, Niemi, 1974). Callan and Noller (1986) suggested that parents tended to overestimate the socially desirable characteristics of the family, whereas adolescents tended to overestimate the negative characteristics. Parents devote themselves in nurturing their children, enhancing family cohesion, and providing a healthy environment for the children. Thus, they have a tendency to portray their families as positive and cohesive, as they have invested much time and effort in maintaining the proper functions of the family (Lerner & Knapp, 1975; Lerner & Spanier, 1980). On the other hand, adolescents focus on searching for self-identity and autonomy. They perform as "the precipitators of change in the family" (Callan & Noller, 1986, p. 818) and may be more critical to the family. The differences in developmental agendas result in discrepancies of parents and adolescents in the perceptions of family processes (Welsh et al., 1998).

There are several theoretical implications of the study. First, the study underscores the importance of studying parental differences in family processes in families (particularly Chinese families) experiencing economic disadvantage. In view of paucity of research in this area, the study is an important addition to the literature. Second, the research employed indigenous conceptions of Chinese family processes, and studied the parental differences in parental control and sacrifice for children's education, which are distinctive and contributive for the theorization of Chinese family models. The study opens "new paths to a deeper understanding of Chinese cultural, social, and psychological processes and patterns" (Yang, 1999, p. 182).

Third, the findings echo with the recent studies on gender differences in parental control (Shek, 2007a, 2008) and support the "stricter mothers

and kinder mothers with detached fathers” thesis (Shek, 2008). The present findings show empirical support for the re-definition of the traditional cultural stereotype of “strict fathers, kind mothers” thesis (Shek, 2008).

Fourth, as the study on parental difference in sacrifice for children’s education in the context of poverty was almost non-existent, the results provide important clues for us to understand the Chinese family patterns of interactions and resources distributions. Though fathers experiencing economic disadvantage strive hard to support their children’s education, mothers display more sacrifice by devoting their time, effort and money for their children’s educational needs. The findings provide valuable information in the understanding of parental contribution of family resources for their children’s education in the context of poverty.

There are also some practical implications of the study. First, mothers take up more parental roles on caring, nurturing, monitoring and control, and have more sacrifice for the education of their children. Mothers shoulder the burden of socialization of the children, and fathers are less involved in parenting. Mothers may also experience dual burdens of heavier parental control and being blamed for children’s behaviors (Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985). Shek (2008) suggested that “higher behavioral control would be physically and psychologically taxing for mothers” (p.679). The strains and stresses of performing family roles may affect the psychological well-being of mothers, and may cause marital conflict. Social workers should be sensitive to the psychological and parenting needs of mothers and address their needs responsively.

Second, though fathers, as “*yi jia zhi zhu*” (the head of the family), have influential roles in the family, the findings show that fathers are less involved in the socialization of the children. There is a need to strengthen fathers’ roles and involvement in parenting. However, long hours of work, low educational standard and cultural inclinations hinder paternal involvement in parenting (Leung & Shek, in press). Social workers have to reach out to engage fathers in family education programs. Men service should be expanded to cover parenting and roles of families.

Third, there is a need to adopt family-based anti-poverty policies, programmes and intervention strategies. Instead of taking a residual



model on providing tangible support for the families, it is necessary to formulate family-friendly policies which enhance joint parenting. The long hours of work may have hindered fathers experiencing economic disadvantage to be involved in socialization of children. Thus, legislation of restriction on maximum working hours should be explored with the implementation of minimum wage legislation in Hong Kong. Besides, the findings also suggest the importance of adopting a family-based intervention approach that enhances parenting in economically disadvantaged families. Family life education, asset building projects for families, and parenting enhancement programs would be necessary.

There are several limitations of the present study. First, the limitation of purposeful sampling should be recognized. As the participated families were not randomly sampled, generalizability of the findings may be limited. Second, the cross-sectional design in this study has the inherent problem in inferring cause-and-effect relationships due to time order. Hence, a longitudinal research design is recommended for future studies. Third, as the assessment of family processes was based on the self-reported questionnaires, the findings may only represent the perceptions of the “insiders”. It would be more illuminating to include observational data in real-life settings from the “outsiders” view so that a more comprehensive picture of family processes can be obtained. Fourth, as the findings presented in the study were based on economically disadvantaged families in Hong Kong, there is a need to assess the generalizability of the findings in different Chinese communities (e.g. mainland China) and Chinese people living in non-Chinese contexts (e.g. Chinese-Americans). Fifth, it was found that the internal consistency of Maternal Demandingness Scale and Maternal Responsiveness Scale reported by mothers were not high (although the alpha values were acceptable). This would increase the measurement errors. Hence, it would be desirable to further examine the psychometric properties of these scales in future.

Despite these limitations, the present findings are pioneering and stimulating in view of the paucity of research in studying the parental differences in family processes of Chinese families experiencing economic disadvantage. Essentially, the study sheds light on understanding the parental differences in parental responsiveness, demandingness, control, and sacrifice for children’s education,

which provide important clues for us to help the families experiencing economically disadvantage. In view of Shek's (2011) comment that "more QOL [quality of life] studies in individuals, families, communities and societies experiencing economic disadvantage should be conducted" (p. 372), the present study serves as an active and constructive response.

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